

# *All About* TU B'SHVAT



A step-by-step guide  
to understanding and honoring the  
Jewish celebration of trees.

FROM  
LAMED VAV HOUSE  
MESSIANIC JEWISH PUBLISHING

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## How It All Began

Tu B'Shvat is one of the four new years on the Jewish calendar, according to the Mishnah (the first text of the Talmud, a large body of Jewish oral law). In the Mishnah, Tu B'Shvat was used as the date when the age of trees was counted in order to determine the fruit tithes owed to the Temple. It is part of the agricultural cycle in the Land of Israel.

Named for the 15th day of the month of Shevat, this festival is known as the New Year of the Trees or the Trees' Birthday. Although it's hard to believe when you live in the West, this time of year is the beginning of spring in the Middle East. The first almond blossoms have opened and the sap in the trees is beginning to rise.

Sephardic Jews would often hold a special Tu B'Shvat seder, a 16th-century custom that has now become common practice in modern Judaism.



*Genesis 1:11*

And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so.





## Popular Traditions

1. It's traditional to eat fruits from Israel on Tu B'Shevat: figs, dates, grapes, olives, and pomegranates.
2. It's also traditional to eat fruits you haven't tasted in a long time (or ever), and to say the Shehechianu (a blessing for experiencing something new).
3. Planting trees and other vegetation on this day have also become a part of this holiday as a show of good stewardship over the Earth.

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Rabbi Simon said,

“There is no plant without an angel in Heaven tending it and telling it, ‘Grow!’”

(Genesis Rabba 10:7)

# About the Tu B'Shvat Seder

In the 16th century, Jewish mystics created this seder with songs, readings, wine, and fruits. Like the Passover seder, this one uses experiential learning via four cups of wine and special foods. Each cup of wine represents different aspects of the fruit tree and of ourselves.

As the seder progresses, we change the color of the wine in the cups (like the changing of the seasons) from the whiteness of winter to the vibrancy of spring. The color gets redder and redder and we look forward to the fully red wine of the Passover seder.

The traditional Tu B'Shevat seder also includes a special order for eating different kinds of fruits, each kind representing the different ways that trees give to us, as well as representing our own spiritual growth. Before eating each kind of fruit, one thing some people do is ask themselves or each other a spiritual questions related to that kind of fruit.



# Spiritual Meanings

The celebration of Tu B'Shvat is not mentioned in the Bible. The oldest reference is found in the Talmud, where Tu B'Shvat is called "the new year of the trees." The Talmud ascribes significance to this date only in terms of the legal implications of taking tithes (10%) from fruits.

About 500 years ago, Jewish mystics revealed the deeper meaning of Tu B'Shvat. They taught that Tu B'Shvat is an opportune time for rectifying the transgression of Adam and Eve. Amazingly, just through the simple act of eating fruit during the Tu B'Shvat festive dinner, we are able to contribute to this cosmic repair ("*tikkun*").

But how? How are we "fixing" the transgression of Adam and Eve, according to the sages? First, let's explore the transgression of Adam and Eve, and then we can understand the mystical meaning of the Tu B'Shvat holiday, and why eating fruit is the way we celebrate it.

The Torah says that Hashem put Adam and Eve in the garden "to work it and to guard it." Jewish oral tradition teaches us that this refers to the do's and don'ts of the Torah. The do's are called the "positive mitzvot" and the don'ts are called the "negative mitzvot." Adam and Eve were given very little to do: "eat from all the trees of the garden." Their only don't, their single prohibition, was not to eat fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. What was that about?

## Spiritual Meanings (cont.)

The Torah teaches that HaShem created the world so that we could experience goodness in general and his goodness in particular. Experiencing his goodness—bonding with HaShem—is the greatest joy imaginable. HaShem empowers us to bond with him by serving his purpose for creation. Just as when we serve others out of love we feel connected to them, so, too, serving HaShem enables us to bond with him. Ironically, serving HaShem is actually self-serving in that it is profoundly fulfilling and pleasurable.

If we eat and enjoy the fruits of this world for HaShem's sake—because this is what He asks of us—then we are actually serving him and bonding with him. We serve HaShem by acknowledging that the fruits of this world are his gifts to us and by intentionally accepting and enjoying those gifts.

The root of life is, in fact, enjoyment—the pleasure of connecting to HaShem. We connect to Hashem by serving Him, and this means obeying his command to enjoy the fruits of this world. While in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve's entire obligation was to enjoy all the lush fruits—with the notable exception of one forbidden fruit. Sure enough, they went after that one. This misdeed demonstrated their confused orientation to the real meaning of pleasure.

Rather than seeing the fruits as pleasurable because they are HaShem's gifts and enjoying them as part of their service to HaShem, they wanted to partake of them independently of Hashem—in fact, contrary to his will.

# Scriptural Applications in Daily Life

HaShem's original plan was for man to tend and care for the "Garden." From Scripture, we learn what this means. We are not to use those things which he gave us solely for our own gain:

"When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof by forcing an axe against them: for thou mayest eat of them, and thou shalt not cut them down (for the tree of the field is man's life) to employ them in the siege." (Deuteronomy 20:19)

Creation is HaShem's signature of his love for us. We are to be good stewards of it, using it to produce the good things he intended them for. One day, he will destroy those who destroy the earth (Revelation 11:18)! We are often compared to trees:

"Their delight is in Adonai's Torah; on his Torah, they meditate day and night. They are like trees planted by streams - they bear their fruit in season, their leaves never wither, everything they do succeeds." (Psalm 1:2-3)

"I have seen a wicked man wielding great power, flourishing like a shade tree in its native soil." (Psalm 37:35)

"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar in the L'vanon. The Torah is compared to the Tree of Life." (Psalm 92:12)



# Spiritual Applications in Daily Life (cont.)

Our fruit should reflect the Messiah's tree:

"After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree..." (Romans 11:24)



"The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who is wise wins souls..." (Proverbs 11:30)

"Thus, my brothers, you have been made dead with regard to the Torah through the Messiah's body, so that you may belong to someone else, namely, the one who has been raised from the dead, in order for us to bear fruit for God." (Romans 7:4 )

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, self-control. Nothing in the Torah stands against such things." (Galatians 3:23-24)

While HaShem created vegetation and flora for food, enjoyment, and beauty, they are also an integral part of the creation's balance. The first commandment to Adam was to care for and manage it, a commandment that still echoes for us to be good and faithful stewards of what he has given us. Many prophetic oracles compare us to trees and fruits thereof; we can't escape making a connection between us

## Spiritual Applications in Daily Life (cont.)

and these wonders of nature that provide us with housing, heat, shade, as well as hold the ground on which we walk together. They serve as good examples of how we should behave towards one another as human beings.



May we remember this prime responsibility as we celebrate the New Year of the Trees.

# A Tu B'Shvat Seder

## First Cup: The World of Asiyah (Actualization)

Walnuts | Almonds | Pomegranates | Coconuts | Pistachios

*Blessing for the first time you experience something (Shehechyanu):*

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, שהחיינו וקימנו והגענו לזמן הזה.

*Baruch atta Adonai Eloheynu Melech ha'olam, shehecheyanu, v'kiymanu, v'higiyanu l'zman hazeh.*

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, King of the Universe, the One who has kept us alive and sustained us so that we could reach this moment.

Pour a glass of white wine, say the blessing for wine:

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם, בורא פרי הגפן.

*Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-gafen.*

Blessed are You O Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

[Drink]

Reflection:

- Although seemingly inedible from the outside, each of the foods eaten at the level of Asiyah, when peeled or shelled, hold gifts that transcend their outward appearance. Like winter, where everything lays dormant and hidden, these fruits and nuts contain inside them the potential to reveal what is hidden within.
- Because of their hard exterior, these foods can represent the human tendency

# A Tu B'Shvat Seder

to judge others by their outward appearance. They can also represent the ways we separate ourselves from other people. Eating these fruits reminds us that whoever we are, we all carry a divine spark within.

Discussion:

- When or how have we “judged a book by its cover” only to realize that we were mistaken?
- When and how have I proudly and self-righteously separated myself from others?

Say the blessing for the fruit of the tree:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם בורא פרי העץ.

*Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, borei p'ri ha-eitz.*

Blessed are You O Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the tree.

[Eat]

A note about almonds:

- Almonds were part of the gift Jacob sent to Joseph's Pharaoh (Genesis 43:11).
- Almonds in all their forms were part of the decorations on the Temple Menorah: (Exodus 25:33–35).
- Almonds prefigured resurrection (Numbers 17:8 [Numbers 17:23]), which can also speak of the resurrection of Messiah, or even to HaShem being able to resurrect our broken dreams, if it is his will.

# A Tu B'Shvat Seder

## **Second Cup: The World of Yetzirah (Formation)**

Cherries | Olives | Plums | Apricots | Avocado

Add a few drops of red wine and fill the rest with white. We now drink our second cup of wine. [Drink]

Just as each new stream begins with a trickle, each flower with a single bud, just a few drops of color transform the hue of our wine.

Reflection:

- Although we discard the pits of these fruits, they are the seeds, the means to rebirth.
- These fruits can remind us that every flowering tree was once bare and that the means to growth can sometimes come from the innermost overlooked places.
- David said of Messiah: The very rock that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone!" (Psalm 118:22)
- This is a statement that Messiah concurred with: "Haven't you ever read in the Tanakh, 'The very rock which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone! This has come from Adonai, and in our eyes it is amazing!' Therefore, I tell you that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to the kind of people that will produce its fruit" (Matthew 21:42-43). This idea can also symbolize the divine potential within us that we have not tapped.

Discussion:

- What is something you have done or created that started out very small and became bigger or more important over time? It can be about a project, a relationship, etc.
- When have we quickly judged people and blindly rejected the potential in them?



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[Eat]

A note about olives:

- As we know, olives, a fruit with hidden potential, is used to make the oil to anoint prophets, kings, and priests.
- Our Master Yeshua is the ultimate Anointed One embodying these three ministries.

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## Third Cup: The World of Beriah (Creation)

Eat: Grapes | Raisins | Apples | Pears | Blueberries | Raspberries

Refill the glass so that there is now half red and half white wine. We drink our third cup of wine. [Drink]

We now have half a cup of red wine and half a cup of white, even though the trees will be full and green and their flowers will blossom, their growth is not complete. So much more will be created; so much more is to come.

Reflection:

- These fully edible fruits can remind us of the wholeness of the world where nothing is wasted and everything nourishes everything else. We can take this time to look at the fullness of our own creations and actions and consider how to deepen our relationships with people.
- The apostle taught that: "Furthermore, we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called in accordance with his purpose; because those whom he knew in advance, he also determined in advance would be conformed to the pattern of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers; and those whom he thus determined in advance, he also called; and those whom he called, he also caused to be considered righteous; and those whom he caused to be considered righteous he also glorified!" (Romans 8:28-30)

Discussion:

- How does each event of my life contribute to its fullness?
- How does each relationship in my life, positive or negative, contribute to its richness?

[Eat]

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A note about grapes:

- Grapes tell us of the time when all will be accomplished, when the Master will come and bring an end to the madness of the world and wholly restore everything the way it ought to be (Matthew 17:11).

## **Fourth Cup: The World of Atzilut (Presence, Emanation, Birth)**

Cinnamon | Rosemary | Bay Leaf | Cedar

Pour a nearly full glass of red wine again and add just a few drops of white. We wait for the fullness of the cup of red wine of Passover. [Drink]

We now come to our final cup; the drops of white in the red remind us of the first cup of this seder and of the cyclical nature of the seasons.

Reflection:

- This final section represents what is invisible to the eye.
- Instead of eating fruit, we may enjoy sweet smells like cinnamon and rosemary. Beyond the cycle of eating is the cycle of breathing, when something lives both within and without us at the same time, when it is so much a part of us that we cannot even see it. Smells create subtle connections in time: the smell of the soil or the smell of dew, of the changing seasons are invisible witnesses of His creation.
- "For ever since the creation of the universe his invisible qualities — both his eternal power and his divine nature — have been clearly seen, because they can be understood from what he has made. Therefore, they have no excuse." (Romans 1:20)

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- "We concentrate not on what is seen but on what is not seen, since things seen are temporary, but things not seen are eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:18)
- In the Book of Esther, the fragrance of the Eternal redeemer God emanates strongly though never even mentioned once.
- The fragrance of Messiah:
  - "Miryam took a whole pint of pure oil of spikenard, which is very expensive, poured it on Yeshua's feet and wiped his feet with her hair, so that the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." (John 12:3)
  - "But thanks be to God, who in the Messiah constantly leads us in a triumphal procession and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of what it means to know him!" (2Corinthians 2:14)
  - "and live a life of love, just as also the Messiah loved us, indeed, on our behalf gave himself up as an offering, as a slaughtered sacrifice to God with a pleasing fragrance." (Ephesians 5:2)

## Discussion:

- "Trusting is being confident of what we hope for, convinced about things we do not see. It was for this that Scripture attested the merit of the people of old. By trusting, we understand that the universe was created through a spoken word of God, so that what is seen did not come into being out of existing phenomena." (Hebrews 11:1-3)
- "By trusting, Noach, after receiving divine warning about things as yet unseen, was filled with holy fear and built an ark to save his household. Through this trusting, he put the world under condemnation and received the righteousness that comes from trusting. By trusting, Avraham obeyed, after being called to go out to a place which God would give him as a possession; indeed, he went out without knowing where he was going. By trusting, he lived as a temporary resident in the Land of the promise, as if it were not his, staying in tents with Yitz'chak and Ya`akov, who were to receive what was promised along with him. For he was looking forward to the city with permanent foundations, of which the architect and builder is God." (Hebrews 11:7-10)

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- "All these people kept on trusting until they died, without receiving what had been promised. They had only seen it and welcomed it from a distance, while acknowledging that they were aliens and temporary residents on the earth. For people who speak this way make it clear that they are looking for a fatherland. Now if they were to keep recalling the one they left, they would have an opportunity to return; but as it is, they aspire to a better fatherland, a heavenly one. This is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city." (Hebrews 11:13-16)
- "By trusting, Moshe, after he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose being mistreated along with God's people rather than enjoying the passing pleasures of sin. He had come to regard abuse suffered on behalf of the Messiah as greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he kept his eyes fixed on the reward." (Hebrews 11:24-26)
- "All of these had their merit attested because of their trusting. Nevertheless, they did not receive what had been promised, because God had planned something better that would involve us, so that only with us would they be brought to the goal." (Hebrews 11:39-40)
- What unseen blessing in your life can you appreciate?

[Eat]

A note about cedar:

- It was used for the Temple.
- Cedar-like wood was used for the Tabernacle.
- It is used for the cleansing of the leper.
- It resists corruption and decay and is therefore a symbol of eternity.
- In wet climates, cedar is used to make roofs (covering).



# Blessing for the Conclusion of the Seder

May the New Year of The Trees begin a year of growth.

May it be a year of renewal for the trees and for us.

May we grow in him through these lessons given to us through fruits and trees.

May our eyes be opened to HaShem's wonders, both seen and unseen.

B'Shem Yeshua HaMashiach, the Agent of all creation: Amein.



# Adamah v'Shamayim (Earth and Sky)

אדמה ושמים  
חום האש צליל המים  
אני מרגיש זאת בגופי  
ברוחי בנשמת

הייה הייה הייה הייה

*Adama Veshamayim  
Chom Ha'esh, Tzlil hamayim,*

Love the earth, love the sky  
Heat of fire, Drop of water

*Ani margish zot begufi, beruchi,  
benishmati*

I can feel it in my body  
In my spirit, and in my soul

*Heya, heya, heya, heya hey, hey,  
hey, ho (2x)*

Heya, hey, hey, hey hey, hey,  
hey, ho (2x)

(Original chant by Tony Wrench; adapted at the Rainbow  
Gathering; translated into Hebrew by Shimon Lev Tahor.)

To listen, go [HERE](#).

# When I am Among the Trees

by Mary Oliver

When I am among the trees,  
especially the willows and the honey locust,  
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,  
they give off such hints of gladness.  
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,  
in which I have goodness, and discernment,  
and never hurry through the world  
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves  
and call out, "Stay awhile."  
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple," they say,  
"and you too have come  
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled  
with light, and to shine."

## ABOUT LAMED VAV HOUSE

Lamed Vav House is a new publishing house promoting messianic Judaism in the context of biblical learning and righteous living.

Much like Roman numerals, Hebrew letters have numerical values. Lamed “ל” has a value of 30; vav, “ו” has a value of 6. Therefore, lamed and vav together equal 36. There is a beautiful Jewish legend that says that at any time on the earth, there are 36 righteous people for the sake of whom HaShem does not destroy the world for its sins. Whether it is true or not, we believe that as much as HaShem is aware of the sin of people, he also adds into his scales of justice all the incredible good done by people of integrity.

This “goodness” is not necessarily based on religious ritual observance, civic obedience, or outward shows of charity, but the type of lifestyle King Solomon may have referred to when he said, “Many a man proclaims his own steadfast love, but a faithful man who can find? The righteous who walks in his integrity—blessed are his children after him” (Proverbs 20:6-7, ESV). Lamed Vav House seeks to promote this lifestyle through both fiction and non-fiction genres.

There are ways that you can help us establish the Kingdom of HaShem on earth as it is in heaven; one of those is by promoting materials that encourage people to live and walk in the integrity of their discipleship to Rabbi Yeshua. You can also submit your manuscript for us to consider, promote us on social media, pray for us, or donate to help build the Kingdom of HaShem through literature.

Visit us at [www.lamedvavhouse.com](http://www.lamedvavhouse.com) to learn more.



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